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DAYTON DAILY NEWS

By Carolin Wilms,Lisa Powell
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“Spirit of the Elbe”

All year the Dayton Daily News is honoring the anniversary of the end of World War II with special coverage.

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The front page of a 1945 edition of the ‘New York Times’ hangs in honor on the wall of a home in Oakwood.

The main photo captures one of the iconic images of the final days of World War II. Two groups of soldiers stand awkwardly, shaking hands, teetering over a broken span of bridge deck over the Elbe River in Germany. It is clearly a posed photo, taken 70 years ago.

The massive headline: “U.S. and Red armies join; split Germany.”

One man, Chaim Thau, is standing in the middle staring straight into the camera. Thau, a Polish citizen who was drafted into the Soviet Army as a translator as they swept through his home country, had not met Americans before that moment.

It was a brief encounter. Thau chatted in German with some U.S. soldiers about their homelands. Men in their units traded vodka for chocolate bars. Then Thau’s Red Army unit drove off. They had to join the final fighting in the streets of Berlin. He was shot in the jaw, hospitalized, and recovered. The war was soon over. Thau returned to his Polish village.

“Basically everything was destroyed,” said his son, retired U.S. Air Force Colonel Jeffrey Thau of Oakwood. “There was nothing there for him to go back to. But he remembered what the GIs on the bridge told him about the United States and the land of opportunity.”

This weekend Jeffrey Thau will be in Torgau, Germany, to help commemorate the 70th anniversary of that moment above the Elbe River. The community of Torgau has marked the occasion ever since the end of the war, and this is Thau’s third visit to the commemoration.